

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in this Application:

Listing of Claims:

1-13 (Cancelled)

14. (Original) A method of making a smectite clay slurry, comprising:

(a) treating a mixture of one or more smectite clays and water with one or more phosphonate additives to form a clay slurry; and

(b) shearing the clay slurry.

15. (Original) A method according to claim 14, wherein the smectite clay is hectorite.

16. (Original) A method according to claim 14, wherein the phosphonate additive is 1-hydroxyethylene-1,1-diphosphonic acid tetra sodium salt.

17. (Original) A method of making a smectite clay slurry according to claim 14, wherein the shearing is performed by a Gaulin homogenizer.

18-22. (Cancelled)

23. (New) A method of making a smectite clay slurry, comprising:

(i) treating a mixture of one or more smectite clays and water with one or more phosphonate additives to form a clay slurry, wherein the phosphonate additive is selected from the group consisting of:

a) Diphosphonic acids of formula $R^1R^2C(PO(OH)_2)_2$,

b) Diphosphonic acids of formula $R^1-CR^2(PO(OH)_2)-R^3-CR^2PO(OH)_2-R^5$,

and

c) The lithium, sodium, potassium, calcium and magnesium salts of the compounds described under a) and b),

where R^1 is selected from the group consisting of H, a linear or branched alkyl, alkene, hydroxyalkyl, aminoalkyl, hydroxyalkene, aminoalkene with 1 to 22 carbon atoms and an aryl, hydroxyaryl, aminoaryl with 6 to 22 carbon atoms; R^2 is selected from the group consisting of R^1 and OH; R^3 is an alkyl with 0 to 22 carbon atoms; and both R^4 and R^5 is selected from the group R^1 ; and

(ii) shearing the clay slurry.